1955-1965

When the first issue of *Approach* appeared in July 1955, naval aviation was undergoing a period of great transition that had begun just after World War II. The jet, put into service in the last year of the war, quickly was overtaking its prop-driven predecessors, although the new technology was initially limited to carrier tactical types. The helicopter, which also had seen service in the last months of the war, was beginning to appear in squadrons.

When *Approach* began publication, the Class A mishap rate was 38.18 per 100,000 flight hours.

Other developments included the angled carrier deck and steam catapult, as well as early versions of landing systems. Aircraft armament began changing with the introduction of air-to-air missiles, guided weapons, and the changeover from the .50-caliber machine gun to the heavier-hitting 20mm cannon. Aircraft radar systems and ejection seats also saw great improvements, that increased aircraft effectiveness and aircrew survivability.

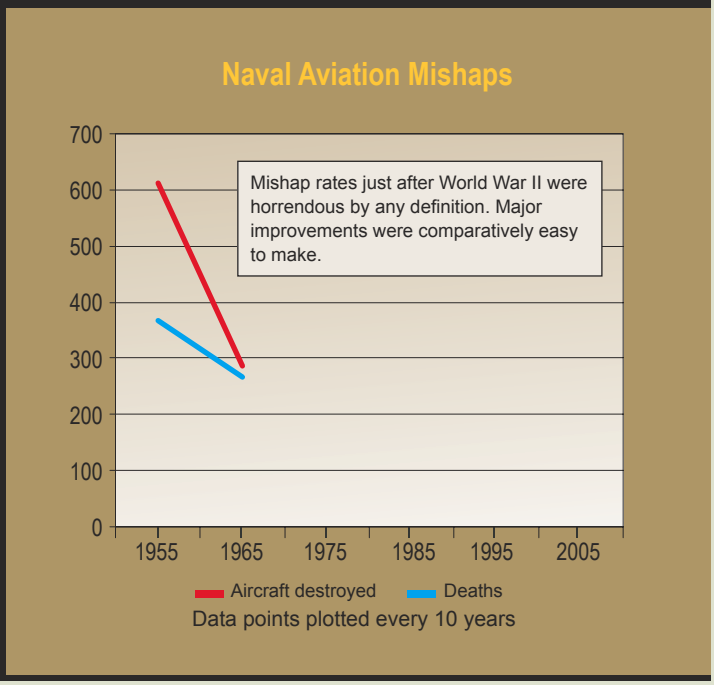
Antisubmarine warfare aircraft saw new developments in radar and weapons, and new types like the Grumman S2F Tracker (and its cargo-carrying COD variant, the TF-1 and AEW model WF-1 Tracer) and Lockheed P2V Neptune began to appear in squadrons.

A completely new area of naval aviation was the space program, with several naval aviators among the initial group of astronauts chosen to make this country's first sub-orbital, then orbital flights, beginning in May 1961.

An older technology began to be phased out: lighter-than-air. The Navy's non-rigid blimp fleet, a major force during the 1930s and 1940s, had pared down to long-ranging airships, whose specialized crews and commanders helped protect American coastlines from enemy attacks until the appearance of more advanced radar and aircraft put the big airships out of business by 1962.

Besides the first publication of safety magazines, such as *Approach*, the Navy also reconfigured its safety program, establishing the Naval Aviation Safety Activity in 1951—it was redesignated the Naval Aviation Safety Center in 1955—then the Naval Safety Center (NSC) in May 1968. The new facility combined the safety activities of other communities, such as submarines and surface with the aviation group.

The Naval Air Training and Operating Procedures Standardization Program (NATOPS) also began in 1961, refining and standardizing operating requirements and procedures for naval aviation and creating the infamous "blue sleeping pills," the NATOPS manuals for each specific aircraft and its variants.



New Aircraft:

1955: Chance Vought XF8U-1 Crusader makes first flight.

1956: First Douglas A3Ds join the fleet with VAH-1 at NAS Jacksonville.

1958: North American T2J-1 (later T-2A) Buckeye makes its first flight. T-2B and T-2C added another engine and trained thousands of carrier aviators during its 40-plus-year career. The McDonnell F4H Phantom II and the Lockheed Electra airliner (reconfigured as the first P3V-1) make their first flight.

1960: The Grumman YA2F-1 (later A-6A) Intruder and W2F-1 (later E-2A) Hawkeye make their first flight.

1964: Converted from an E-2A, the YC-2A Greyhound makes its first flight. Instead of indicating manufacturer as in P3V (V for Lockheed), the new designation is P-3, with a sequential letter to indicate variant, as in P-3C.

1965: The A-7A Corsair II makes its first flight.

Important Dates:

May 2, 1955: Aviation Officer Candidate School (AOCS) opens.

August 22, 1955: Cdr. Robert G. Dose, CO of VX-3, makes the first landing using newly developed mirror-landing system.

September 12, 1955: All fighters in production begin to be equipped for aerial refueling.

October 1, 1955: USS *Forrestal* (CVA-59) placed in commission as lead ship in a new class of super carriers.

October 16, 1956: First students receive Naval Observer wings, the forerunner of today's Naval Flight Officers (NFOs).

December 14, 1961: The first installation of the pilot-landing-aid television (PLAT) system is completed on USS *Coral Sea* (CVA-43).

October 1962: The designation system for all U.S. military aircraft, in use since before World War II, is changed and simplified.

March 26, 1965: Operation Rolling Thunder begins in Southeast Asia.

June 17, 1965: F-4 Phantoms score the first Navy kills over North Vietnam, shooting down two MiG-17s.